

Remarks by Ambassador Harry K. Thomas Jr.  
Overseas Security Advisory Council  
June 23, 2010

Good afternoon. Magandang hapon.

Let me thank all of you for being here today, and for inviting me to speak. The Overseas Security Advisory Council represents a powerful coalition between the U.S. government and American companies. We share a common commitment to fair trade, to safe workplaces, and to a secure environment in which businesses can flourish.

We work best when we work together, and I have heard of the tremendous cooperation we've shared during disasters like last year's typhoons, through electoral uncertainties, and as we weather global economic turbulence. So let me thank Serge (Grynkewich), the current chairman, for his leadership of this fine organization. I also want to recognize Ed Pooley, who led the OSAC until 2008. Just a little later I will be announcing the next chairperson, so stay tuned. And finally, let me thank the Embassy's Regional Security team – Jake Wohlman, Shaun Gavin and the rest – for being our voice in this important alliance.

These are exciting time for the Philippines, and dynamic times for the business world. Now, more than ever, is the time for businesses to highlight their contributions, enunciate their principles, and intensify their advocacy for social changes that will make employees safer, business processes more efficient, and new ventures more viable. Let me start by laying out three ideas of my own that my Embassy team will be working on – and seek your support.

First – we all need to stand together against corruption. It is pervasive and corrosive. Corruption is a major factor that impedes sound business planning, progress on social justice, and economic development. The President-elect made this a pillar of his campaign, and I think we should be principled and firm in joining his efforts in support of good governance broadly, and against corruption specifically.

Second – we need to band together to protect people, and I especially mean victims of trafficking. Trafficking robs children of their innocence and of their futures; it steals the right of choice from men and women; it degrades the human soul into a commodity to be bought and sold. We must be part of a collected effort to stop traffickers. It means if you are in the computer business, making sure your systems aren't used for cybersex. If you are in the hotel business, it means making sure your facilities aren't exploited by traffickers. If you are in the transport field, making sure your routes and vehicles are not being appropriated by traffickers. The tragic trade in human lives touches almost every sector –we must all work together to stop it. One of OSAC's missions is information sharing, and I think on trafficking in persons there is a lot of opportunity for progress.

Third – we need to work together to build a strong future for American business in the Philippines by raising popular awareness about the great contributions you all make. You create jobs, you model fair employment practices, you are in the vanguard of safe workplaces, and you are generous in reaching out to communities. All of this makes a strong story to be told, and I will be glad to tell it, again and again.

OSAC is particularly important when it comes to exchanging information about security issues we all face here and across the globe. I assure you that we will continue to play our part to contribute to the safety and security of the U.S. community in the Philippines.

Let me conclude by again signaling our strong support for OSAC, and by thanking Serge for his incredible leadership during some very interesting times. Serge has concluded his term of office with distinction, and we are all grateful for his service. It is my privilege to announce that the OSAC Steering Committee has elected Simoun Ung as the new chairperson of OSAC. Thank you all very much (maraming salamaat).